

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND MANAGEMENT

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IT MAY SEEM SURPRISING THAT ANYONE SHOULD TRY to write an article bringing together spirituality and the world of work, and readers will probably react in different, even opposite, ways. Some people think that spirituality is something very personal and intimate, which has nothing to do with work. To think about work and spirituality together, or even just to note that employers sometimes talk about spirituality, will be seen by some as an attack on individual freedom, and by others as a dangerous diversion from proper corporate business. But there are also those who are seeking greater integration in their lives, and for them it is worthwhile to try to connect the spiritual with the professional.

A number of organizations now have a real interest in this desire for spiritual integration, although the movement is only in its beginnings. The initiative comes from both managers and employees. Managers are coming to realise that the demand for financial success at all costs can be counter-productive or lead to stagnation if an organization does not respect human beings for what they are, and if employees find their work meaningless. Such managers acknowledge spiritual needs, and look for ethically responsible ways of doing business. Their influence is a major reason why people have begun to speak of spirituality at work. People no longer want to live out of a split between the values promoted in their organizations and their own personal values.

In this situation, managers are trying to bring a spiritual dimension to the way in which their enterprises work. Signs of this development can be seen in specialist management journals, in the programmes of training centres and on many websites. The movement, however, takes different forms depending on the individual spiritual sensitivities of those who are putting it into practice. It also embraces different spiritual traditions. It may be associated with established monotheistic

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religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also with Zen Buddhism and even with New Age ideas. This can give the impression of a movement that is all over the place, confused and rather out of control. An uncritical interest in 'spirituality' can put people at risk of pantheism or navel-gazing, or of dogmatism or even sectarianism.

Within this wide-ranging context, I have chosen to focus on one spirituality within the Christian tradition, because of its particular systematic character: Ignatian spirituality. Ignatian spirituality allows space for both the relational and the professional aspects of human existence, and its capacity for integrating the different dimensions of a person's life is widely acknowledged.

I brought together twenty French administrators with experience of Ignatian spirituality in order to study how such people handled the responsibilities of management, how they functioned within their workplaces. Their experience of professional structures and of management made what they said particularly interesting; they had plenty of freedom to make decisions, and they had room for manoeuvre within their organizations. The people I interviewed, sixteen men and four women, were aged between 35 and 65. They worked in various sorts of enterprise: public sector, private sector, mixed and co-operative. Their professional backgrounds were very varied: energy, medicine, social work, aeronautics, geophysics, publishing, cosmetics, accountancy, academia, transport.

I shall arrange what I found out from them under headings derived from Ignatius: contemplation in action; spiritual combat; discernment; important decisions; and covenant prayer.

Contemplation in Action

I became more and more aware that work isn't a watertight compartment, separated from the other compartments of my life, and thus from my spiritual life. Also, just as Ignatius discovered when he was training himself, the understanding, the memory and the senses can all serve the Lord.

God isn't outside my work. Quite the contrary. As I live my life and face its questions, it's my relationship with God that is enriched and deepened. That relationship happens through my work because work is the place where I have most to do with others, and also because it's where I have most power, where I possess most, where others are. Work and activity, whatever they may be, are the place for dialogue between God and the world, between God and oneself. Ignatian spirituality allows me to live out a greater integration within.

For the people I interviewed, spirituality and work are closely linked. God is not outside their work, but at the very heart of their professional lives and encounters. And contemplating God enables them to understand the world of work more broadly. Work becomes a place where they can contemplate God active in every person as they are participating in the work of creation and in the Paschal Mystery. This contemplation is a matter of faith, because the reality is not always evident in daily life.

Contemplating God in Every Human Being

Like Zacchaeus, we need to begin by coming down from the trees in which we are protecting ourselves. It's not about climbing up to Him and putting a distance between ourselves and the world. Coming down towards God, towards the Christ who was a human being among other human beings. Now, to come down towards Christ is to come down towards my brothers and sisters, and to encounter others. There's no true encounter with Christ that does not lead me to talk with others.

Never to lose respect for the person in front of me, because they are created in the image of God. Everyone is to be valued because they are valued and loved by God. I am thus trying to keep this valuing in

mind even after the redundancies Because a person has made a professional mistake or is out of place in the firm, that doesn't make them any less valuable in God's sight. I'm trying never to lose sight of this consideration.

Most of the administrators stressed the importance of relationships. The human being has a special value, and an encounter with another person can have a spiritual significance that transforms it radically. God is present in the other person. God gives Godself to be contemplated in the faces of other people, in their lives, and particularly in their actions, their words and their behaviour. The spiritual dimension of such human encounters thus leads to an attitude of respect and service.

In an organization the personnel or 'human resources' department is one of the places where the human being has priority. This point was often made by the administrators in my interviews. They had a strong sense of each individual's uniqueness, and tried to foster respect for employees within their organizations. One sign of this respect was investment in people: a concern to offer employees help with personal and professional development. Training was adapted to the employees' needs, and there were annual reviews. These administrators were concerned to support members of their organizations who were affected by redundancy, and were sensitive to their needs as a matter of social justice.

But personnel management is not the only place where God can be contemplated. Another area where the encounter with God in other people regularly came up was that of maintaining fair and just relationships with clients and suppliers. The administrators were also concerned to be at God's service and to respect the encounter with God in their work itself. And social workers and those who worked with the sick had discovered a special dimension to the encounter with God: the faces that they saw evoked for them the face of the suffering Christ.

My work involves a special care for helping the young women in the hostel and supporting them as they develop. This support is for me something spiritual. When I see a young woman in distress, she throws me, through her poverty, back on the presence of God. This is just basic for me: there's something of the contemplation of God in these young women as they suffer. I find in them the face of the suffering Christ. A haggard expression on a face is for me an

expression of God's own poverty. We find God in the poor. I cannot but look at things spiritually in these situations.

Work: Participating in Creation

Human beings are created in God's image. As such they are in a full sense co-creators of their own lives and those of others through life's encounters. The human vocation, which is in the image of our creator God, is also that of being a creator in every aspect of our existence, and of being responsible for our acts that are more or less creative or destructive of the creation willed by God.

By developing this network of chief executives I am a creative agent in the economic sphere, and at the same time I am also something else. When you share in God's creative act, then you are living out the Ignatian maxim: 'This should be the rule of your undertakings: have faith in God as if their success depended entirely on you and not on God. However, use all the means as if you had nothing to do, and God had to do it all.'

Another way in which work is linked to the contemplation of God in action is through its being a participation in God's creative act. Some of the administrators understood their work like this. Creation—the whole range of what has been created by God, animal, vegetable and mineral—is not something that came into being once and for all a few million years ago. It is developing, continuously. Moreover, it has been entrusted to humanity; as humanity becomes a co-creator, it takes responsibility for carrying creation forward without thereby becoming its owner. The Ignatian maxim cited above well expresses how individuals are involved in the development of creation while yet remaining humble servants.

This participation in the creative act occurs, for example, when a new technology or device is developed in the service of humanity, when a new structure is built, when new jobs are created, or just when a job is well done. When a person's work is more abstract or administrative, it is not so easy to perceive this participation. But to work for the flourishing of creation, whatever you are doing, is to preserve what is most humane and to ensure that your work is peaceful, constructive, just and life-giving.

This approach to the spirituality of work carries with it a sense of social responsibility, a concern to engage with the world in the name of faith. For the administrators who approached it like this, work was not just a way of satisfying needs, whether personal, family or professional. Their work drew them into solidarity with others. They saw themselves as being at the



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service of their staff, and they wanted to contribute to employees' human and professional development. They wanted to serve humanity and foster what Ignatius calls 'the more universal good'.

Openness to other people and engagement with the world are fundamental to Ignatian spirituality. The human relationship with God is not conceived on the model of some kind of fusion between God and the individual in the way that it sometimes is in certain other spiritualities, especially New Age ones. On the contrary, as a person discovers a close relationship with God in the following of Christ, they open themselves at the same time to the idea of otherness. On this basis, there arises a radical commitment to society, and a heightened social awareness.

However, this concern for engagement with the world and the upbuilding of creation can also give rise to ethical dilemmas. After all, no action automatically contributes to the development of creation. Some activities have negative, destructive effects, and give rise to inner conflict. Some of the administrators I questioned stressed the difficulty they sometimes felt in reconciling their desire for participation in creation's development with respect for humanity and the constraints within which they had to operate professionally. I shall return to this point below.

Work as a Participation in the Paschal Mystery

During a retreat I made this summer, I often wondered what I was doing in this job. I didn't have any desire to carry on, and was saying to myself that I'd be better off buying a bookshop or selling flowers. But then one thing kept on coming back to me: if Christ bothered to come down to earth to the situation he did, at a difficult period when there were lots of injustices, it makes no sense for me to stop struggling to move things forward as soon as a difficulty comes.

For justice to grow, you also have to accept the cross, accept the difficulties, accept that it all happens through Christ's passion. Ignatian spirituality, as I see it, involves a contemplation of the passion that is extremely powerful. It lets you put things in their proper place when you see that the divinity is hidden amid our humanity, and how the Lord takes on our human condition completely.

The time I experienced the power of this spirituality most strongly was at a very difficult period when they were telling me that they wanted to close down this factory in France. At that time daily prayer, reviewing my prayer, and spiritual direction were absolutely everything for me. I had lots of spiritual experiences. Strangely, I was in a place of great confidence; I was contemplating the mystery behind these human difficulties, this inability to understand what was going on.

A final meaning that the people I talked to gave to their work was that of a participation in the Paschal Mystery. Several said that they were living out of this, or have lived out of it at certain points in their lives. The joys and the difficulties they had experienced in their work, read in the light of Christ's life, had led them to discover a paschal dimension in their work, a way of being drawn into the following of Christ in his passion and resurrection. This did not in any way reduce their objective difficulties, but faith gave these difficulties meaning. It enabled them, for instance, to develop greater patience. They were strengthened in their desire to remain faithful and to continue working at the very heart of a human reality which was otherwise arid.

The three approaches to work that I have just described echo some elements in Ignatius' own presentation of his spirituality in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In particular, the Contemplation on the Incarnation and the Contemplation to Attain Love speak of God's presence in the creation, and in human beings in and through their actions and everything they experience. Ignatius also stresses how God is present when people are speaking with each other or entering into relationships. These

approaches share a sense of reverence and service, as well as a concern to act in a way consonant with everything's proper purpose—features we recognise from the Principle and Foundation.

Inner Conflict

Another key idea is that of inner conflict. We can hear the struggle in the words of respondents who are seeking to live out of their personal values:

I often experience tension around the question of what this firm is for. I need constantly to be checking that it isn't just for my benefit, that it isn't just about me. Obviously the accounts are important, but I need to keep my two feet on the ground and not go for profitability simply as an end in itself.

Seeking and finding God in all things is something fundamental for me, and yet at the same time a constant struggle.

One day I tried to speak out about an injustice. I defended one of my colleagues whom they were trying to make redundant because—so it was said—he had ideas that would undermine the firm's financial health. I demanded that they proved this, and I also threatened to take the management to the tribunal if the redundancy decision stood. The following day, the chairman called me in, and asked me to quit. These were difficult moments, but I think that over the years I have grown in freedom.

The meaning that we give to work, the management of human resources, the quest for social justice, the mission of an organization—all these are difficult issues which give rise to plenty of tensions. The conflicts seem to occur on two levels. On the one hand, there are conflicts within the self. People experience tensions in themselves between their ideals and quite different values. Administrators are likely to find their concern for absolute ideals co-existing with desires for a good reputation, for power, and for profit as an end in itself.

On the other hand, conflicts can also touch on other people connected with an organization. All these administrators who are nourished by Ignatian spirituality work with colleagues, whether bosses or employees, who do not share their own sense of purpose, and who may simply not be bothered about social justice, about a personnel policy respectful of human values, or about a vision of the organization

centred on service. The administrators' fundamental attitudes may not really be understood; they may become irritating or controversial; and this may have negative consequences for their careers.

Conflicts of both kinds are addressed in Ignatian spirituality: Ignatius evokes them at several points in the *Spiritual Exercises* and in his writings on discernment of spirits.

Discernment of Spirits

In my work, there are many decisions in which I let spiritual discernment play a part. It's a kind of habitual disposition that comes into any thought about ethics and decision-making. It happens as a kind of reflex; it doesn't take much time. There's a way of putting the question that helps you take the decision. Then it has to survive the test of prayer. We need to leave some time for confirmation. It's a whole regular pattern of asking questions and taking decisions. Indifference is very significant when you look at the different ways of putting questions. It's a sort of detachment. If you get there, then the pros and cons come more easily. I'm very well aware, besides, that I don't always have the time to ask myself the needful questions and to become detached. But I also know that light will come in the days to follow.

When it came to delicate decisions about their organizations—decisions about salaries, or putting together a team, or dealing with a customer—these administrators used Ignatian discernment. They did not explicitly use it for more everyday choices, but they found, as they reflected on a decision or entered into the prayer of covenant, that discernment nevertheless was happening. For important decisions, the people I interviewed used the stages of discernment developed by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*: studying the situation; seeking out and analyzing the arguments for and against each possibility in a spirit of indifference; listening to interior movements; and prayer.

It is interesting to note the emphasis here on indifference and on prayer, because it demonstrates from the outset what is specific about Ignatian discernment. People make their options in a desire for disponibility, while trying to listen to God, while maintaining a dialogue with God. This relationship with God is the ultimate purpose of the decision; it also serves as the criterion for rightness of intention. The effort to listen to inner movements, paying attention to one's experience, is also of spiritual significance. These people are listening



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to the movements of the Spirit, to the way in which the Spirit moves the person. And by using reason, by analyzing the pros and cons, they are observing what Ignatius says about God's self-expression coming to be within people's understanding, memory and reason. The alternatives up for decision are real existential possibilities, and thus the object of the decision be-

comes a means of relating to God in lived life. The object of choice thus becomes an aspect of 'seeking and finding God in all things'.

However, the administrators I interviewed rarely used 'communal discernment' for decisions taken collectively. The principal reason for this was the frankly spiritual orientation of Ignatian discernment, the desire explicitly to be listening to God's will. In a mainstream organization, there would not be unanimity about such an orientation, and some people would be against it—something which is quite normal and healthy. You cannot share spiritual convictions by force; and the factors that bring people together within a professional environment are unrelated to spirituality. Moreover, any attempt to impose a spiritual attitude would be failing to respect freedom of conscience; spirituality is rooted in a relationship with God and a desire to be at God's service. Here we come up against one of the limits to the use of Ignatian spirituality in organizations.

Important Decisions

Last year I was wondering whether I should move to India to take over the leadership of the branch firm there, or stay here in order to develop the worldwide business. I made a discernment, in which my spiritual reflection and my prayer played a fundamental role. I went through the pros and cons, and carried all that into prayer. If I went to India, it would be an important challenge, and very interesting; but I also noticed that I would be in quest of personal aggrandisement. Going to India would be acting out of a mere image of myself, out of

a dream. The real call to me was to stay here to work in headquarters, and develop a really good training department. This was where the need was for me, not in India. What I became aware of was the Ignatian *magis*, the quest for the greater service, rather than my career-building.

Making an important decision is a way of embodying the choice to follow Christ in real life, by means of a specific option. It represents the heart and the fruit of the Ignatian process. During the interviews, sixteen of the twenty administrators stressed that they had taken at least one decision about their work, and in particular about their own career development, by making a discernment. Some had changed their jobs, seeking to join an organization whose values were more in conformity with their own, perhaps at the risk of a salary cut or loss of the promotion prospects that would have come from a more conventional path.

Obviously similar detachment exists among people who are not religious at all. But here the reasons given were explicitly spiritual. These were managers who had changed their jobs, for example, in order to find 'a balance in my personal life within which the spiritual has its proper place'. Others had expressly sought to earn their living in ways that enable them to be of greater service. Without in any sense ignoring issues about career development or denying a desire for professional success, they had a sense of work's spiritual meaning and wanted their new job 'to correspond with God's will', so that it could be 'the source of a greater service, a greater usefulness to God'. Once again, they were echoing the *Spiritual Exercises*, which invite us to desire and choose 'only ... what is more conducive for us in view of the end for which we are created' (Exx 23).

In all these cases the influence of Ignatian spirituality shaped a person's way of living out discernment in the context of a decision about their work. The practice of spiritual discernment had intensified their desire to hand themselves over to God, and to commit themselves to the service of God and of others. For these managers, work was no longer an end in itself; they saw it as something that 'may help the human person in pursuing the end for which they are created' (Exx 23).

The Examen: The Prayer of Covenant

I try daily to review what I experience. It's very important for how I handle my teams at the hostel. It's something quite fundamental, and I experience it as a time of prayer. I open my diary at the day's page, I look at what I have lived through, and I think through in advance what is going to be asked of me. Above all I prepare myself for what I'm going to find disturbing, for the young women in the hostel who are in trouble, for the more awkward team meetings, for important decisions ... I entrust these to the Lord.

To be a contemplative in action: I'm afraid I'm not that. I find it difficult to feel myself contemplative in the daily routine that I'm involved in all the time, as if I were somehow detached. It's rather that the moments of review and of prayer help me see this presence of God after the event. Gradually my behaviour changes, because these moments of review invite me to see the positive side of things and of people as well. It's so much easier to see the bad side of people, or to latch on to the negative things people think and say. Having these regular review sessions lets me discover where God has been present during my day in my contacts, my gestures, my words ... in my relations with others. And I sense that this is deeply transformative. I am being invited to have a positive attitude, which isn't easy when you're involved in the heat of the action.

Thirteen of the twenty administrators whom I interviewed mentioned that they prayed daily. This was a time when they reviewed their day, and placed their work, their encounters, their lives before God. And after having drawn profit from the past day, they would open themselves to the future, entrusting to God in advance what they could foresee.

These two quotations not only show how the spiritual lives of the respondents had an effect on their work, but also show that the Examen, the 'prayer of covenant', gave them a time when they could actually experience their activities, the days they spent, and the contacts they made as gifts received from God. Daily prayer was a time of reflection, and of integration. God's own self was reflected, revealed, unveiled in the details of their lives. Conversely, daily life, its work and activities, became under God—with a little detachment—an experience of the divine presence.

This illustrates the importance of the prayer of covenant in Ignatian spirituality as outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Prayer is not a matter of the exclusive absorption of the human being into God. It is

rather a time of drawing breath, and of dialogue with God—a dialogue in which our activities and the people we meet are all present.

There are, then, real links between the spiritual lives of these administrators and the ways in which they approach the professional tasks of management. We have looked at various themes: contemplation in action; spiritual conflict; the use of discernment; approaches to important decisions. We have seen how prayer has informed personnel policy, career development, personal decisions and concerns for social justice—not only at the personal and interpersonal level, but also structurally. People's spiritual awareness certainly affects their management style, and conversely their professional life enriches and puts flesh on the spiritual life. The dialogue between the two is a real one.

However, the desire to connect work and the dynamics of the spiritual life is not always easily fulfilled, if only because the individuals involved are in conflict, both within themselves and with other people in their organization. Moreover, there are natural limits to the integration of the spiritual and professional lives, and these become evident when we consider communal discernment. The spiritual component of work remains a very personal matter, and it resists being incorporated into organizations in any systematic way, although it can have positive effects on them, particularly with respect to human resources and to the overall mission of an organization. But in the end, the desire for integration between work and spirituality, in both the personal and the professional dimensions of life, remains as a persistent call and appeal in the hearts of those searching for God's will in all things.

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