THE *DELIBERATION* IN THE MARKET PLACE

Brian Grogan

The Challenge

ACCORDING TO A RECENT STATISTIC, 85 million meetings occur every day. Many of us spend much of our lives on meetings—preparing for them, attending them and following through on them, and perhaps also recovering from them! Meetings are highly important because the decisions that emerge from them shape our world. Often they are complex, high-powered, influenced by strong pressure groups. The concern of those present is to get the task done; there may be no other common bond, no sense of community and no sense of God. What relevance has Ignatian discernment in such situations? As people who want to promote the Kingdom of God in this world, how can we use it at meetings where no one other than ourselves is interested in the God-issue? In the majority of such gatherings the dynamics of Ignatian discernment have no visible place. Is Ignatian group discernment for privileged settings only, or can we adapt it to the manifold needs and opportunities of our secular world as we have adapted the Spiritual Exercises?

Ways Forward

The Power of One: Saul Alinsky

Many Christians find themselves silent, passive and frustrated at meetings: they complain that the parish priest would not listen, or that the boss had his mind made up, or that a few strident voices dominated the proceedings. Apathy in regard to meetings, even 'godly' ones, is widespread. Can one 'ordinary' person make a difference? We

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Saul Alinsky

tend to say that, unless we have numbers or a position of power, we can make little impact.

Yet the work of Saul Alinsky (1910–1972) shows that one person, well armed with the right strategies, can influence a neighbourhood, a corporation, or a Church.[1] Alinsky was born to Russian Jewish parents in 1909 in Chicago. Though he received a PhD in archaeology in 1930 his real interest was in power structures and their abusive domination of the poor. He became a realistic and effective community activist, and his writings show how one person can effect change even in seemingly impossible situations. He had the capacity to identify common interests among groups that were traditionally hostile to one another. Although he worked for the Roman Catholic Church, training priests in community analysis and organization, he has been labelled a communist and Marxist, the amoral guru of left-wing activism.

Alinsky is to be read with critical care, but he is helpful to the individual who wishes to make a difference for good in an unjust world. My own reading of Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* made me ask what Ignatius and he might have in common in their aims and ways of proceeding. Ignatius too worked alone for many years, trying to help others, and succeeded well in his chosen task.

'Who Speaks for Wolf?'

An Iroquois myth tells of a moment in the tribe's history when the council of the braves met to decide where to move for the next hunting season. The place chosen was in fact occupied by wolves, which attacked and killed many of the tribe. The remainder had to choose: either kill

[1] Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1972).

the wolves or move elsewhere. But since killing the wolves would make them the sort of people they did not want to be, they moved on.

To avoid repeating their earlier error, they decided that in all future council meetings someone should be appointed to represent the wolf. The contribution of the representative would be invited with the question, 'Who speaks for wolf?'[2]

The issue today is, 'Who speaks for God?' At the United Nations or in national parliaments, at a neighbourhood meeting dealing with rezoning properties or combating drugs, at a hospital board debating an issue of misconduct: who speaks for God? What role does God intend for the concerned Christian in a public forum? Vatican II is eloquent in its call to the laity to direct temporal affairs according to God's will (*Lumen gentium*, 31), and speaks of a generation of new women and men, the artisans of a new humanity (*Lumen gentium*, 30). This is a fine aspiration, but how can it be realised?

The Deliberation[3]

From April to June 1539, Ignatius and nine companions came together in Rome to deliberate two important issues regarding their future. First, given that they wanted to serve God in the Church, should they remain united, even if geographically separated, or go their separate ways? Secondly, if they remained bonded, should they promise obedience to one of their number—which in practice meant founding a religious order?

They differed in age, in nationality and in their views on the matters in hand. Convinced that the Holy Spirit would help them, they undertook to give themselves over to prayer, mortification and reflection for as long as was necessary to come to an agreed conclusion. The text of the *Deliberation of the First Jesuits* that resulted from this process is short, written in Latin by one of the participants, perhaps Jean Codure. But it provides us with a valuable model of Ignatian corporate discernment.

[2] Mark Rowlands, *The Philosopher and the Wolf: Lessons from the Wild on Love, Death and Happiness* (London: Granta, 2008).

[3] An English translation of the *Deliberation* is available in John Carroll Futrell, *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 188–194. A recent commentary by Joseph Conwell on the *Deliberation,* with bibliography, is to be found under the title 'Deliberaciones 1539' in *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana* (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 2007), cols. 549–554.

The first issue was resolved without serious difficulty: the companions believed that, since it was God who had joined them together in friendship and common vision, they should maintain this bond to give them apostolic energy and purpose for the challenging times ahead; to be faithful to the demands made by the Pope, they should be faithful also to one another.

The second question was more difficult: if they were to stay bonded, what form should their union take? The complexity of this issue forced them to adopt certain processes, outlined below, which would assist them in finding God's will. Finally, and 'not without vigils and prayers and labours of mind and body' they reached unanimous agreement that they would vow obedience to one of their number, founding a religious order. They then sorted out a number of consequent issues and, on 24 June 1539, they concluded their deliberations 'joyfully and in complete concord of spirit'. They were never again to meet as a group.

Jesuit Usage

It appears that after 1540 Ignatius and the first Jesuits did not continue to use corporate discernment along the lines of the *Deliberation*. Perhaps Ignatius and the men around him in Rome at any given time truly had 'God always before their eyes' and could manage without the formality of the *Deliberation.* While we tend to think of Ignatius as the master of good governance, Markus Friedrich's study of governance in the Society of Jesus between 1540 and 1773 shows us an Ignatius who used a very *ad hoc* style to manage the expanding Company of Jesus. Flexibility was preferred to strategic planning; the curia and the wider world were linked by letters rather than by personal inspection; and middle management by Provincials was subordinated to central control. 'Very often, Roman decisions seem to have been more the result of a muddling-through than of clearly defined strategies.'[4] This argues against any formal use of the processes which were so helpful in the *Deliberation.* Outspoken critics among the Jesuits themselves argued for alternative forms of government, chief among them Juan de Mariana, in 1592.

[4] See Markus Friedrich, 'Governance in the Society of Jesus 1540–1773: Its Methods, Critics and Legacy Today', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 41/1 (Spring 2009), 21.

Jesuit General Congregations can be regarded as an exercise in corporate discernment, but informally rather than formally; and Jesuit meetings on other levels rarely draw explicitly on the *Deliberation*.

Ignatian corporate discernment was excellently presented by John English and others in the 1980s and 1990s.[5] Many leadership groups, Jesuit and other, found these workshops helpful, but they presumed a group intent on finding God's will together and prepared to use appropriate means, such as prayer, sharing, liturgy, facilitation and so forth. The time demand of ten days or more made such formal corporate discernment a rare and privileged event even among religious groups.

Do we then limit ourselves to corporate discernment within privileged settings and to private discernment, or are there hidden riches with the *Deliberation* which can enliven our everyday meetings, and give to religious congregations, their partners in mission and individual Christians a new energy and effectiveness in meetings? Surely Ignatius brought to the dynamics of the *Deliberation* what he had learnt of the art of good decision making. What then can we draw from the *Deliberation* to strengthen our individual efforts to help others through meetings?

A Spirituality of Meetings

What I am offering here is a spirituality of meetings which has emerged from an MA course on Applied Spirituality that a colleague and I have taught over the past eight years at the Milltown Institute, Dublin. Students have come year after year because they want to learn how to share the richness of their spirituality in the business, professional, religious and family spheres. If this cannot be done, they say, *applied* spirituality loses much of its impact.

Their interest raises the issue of the spirituality of meetings. For anyone in the Ignatian tradition, who is committed to trying 'to find God in all things', an adequate spirituality of meetings is essential, since meetings dominate so many of our lives. It is hoped that others will add their own nuances to what is given here, and also flesh out what

[5] See George Schemel and others, *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises for the Corporate Person* (Scranton: U. of Scranton P, 1989); John English, *Spiritual Intimacy and Community: An Ignatian View of the Small Faith Community* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992); Judith Roemer, *The Group Meeting as a Contemplative Experience* (Wernersville: Typrofile, 1983). See too the excellent set of articles in *The Way Supplement*, 85, 'Discerning Together' (1996). All of these offer rich resources for our topic.

can be drawn from the *Deliberation*. What is proposed can be adapted to bridge ecumenical and interreligious divisions, though the focus here is on Christians. It responds to the question—perhaps not often asked—'How can I integrate meetings into my relationship with God?'

- There is a divine agenda for the world which overarches all human agendas.
- Human agendas should be in tune with the divine agenda.
- The divine agenda, according to Jesus, is the Kingdom of God, which, in this world, centres on the development of inclusive communities.[6]
- Bidden or unbidden, the Spirit is present at all meetings, and the task of the Christian at meetings is to promote the Spirit's work.
- The Spirit is operative wherever truth, justice, love and inclusion are promoted, or where their opposites are challenged.
- The Christian is to be a spokesperson for the Spirit, that is, for gospel values, whether or not these are named as such.
- This spirituality of meetings is Trinitarian: the divine agenda of the Father; the Son's work in making this agenda known; and the Spirit's work in moving this agenda forward to its completion.[7]

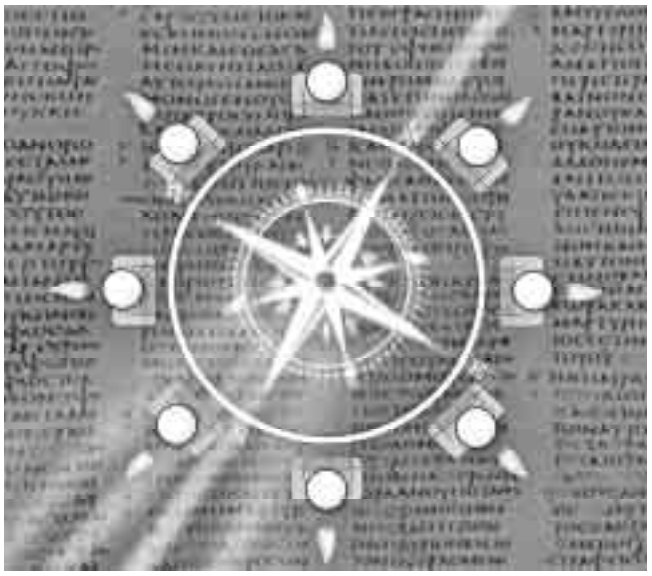
The Christian as Mentor

A key Ignatian question when faced with an issue is to ask: 'What can I do?' (Exx 53). Let us use the term 'mentoring' to describe *what one can helpfully contribute at meetings*.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Mentor was the name of the wise man whom Ulysses assigned to take care of his son Telemachus. In our account of the role in a meeting, the mentor may have no formal authority or power such as the chairperson or a facilitator has. The role of the

[6] See, for example, Peter McVerry, *Jesus, Social Revolutionary?* (Dublin: Veritas, 2008), and Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

[7] Space limitations forbid a presentation here of the theological underpinnings of this spirituality of meetings, but this will be found in Phyllis Brady and Brian Grogan, *Meetings Matter! Spirituality and Skills for Meetings* (Dublin: Veritas, 2009). The current article presents the Ignatian background to meetings, which is only implicit in the book.



original Mentor was simply a diplomatic one: 'Keep an eye on the lad if you can—he's a bit wild!'

Yet the role of the mentor as used here has much in common with that of a group facilitator. The mentor speaks 'from the floor' but has cultivated a certain vision and skills which may help the group to achieve its purpose. If the group has a good facilitator, the mentor will have less to do. The mentor has to ask permission to intervene: if that is refused, the mentor cannot contribute his or her skills. The mentor simply watches out for and supports the Spirit. Like the Spirit, he or she is a positive and resourceful presence whose concern is to foster the divine agenda by creative and supportive interventions. It would be naïve to promise that such interventions will always be successful: the Christian goal is witnessing to the Spirit, rather than success.[8] If a mentor is silenced, he or she can still pray hard for the group.

Jesus as Mentor

Jesus engaged in endless meetings; this is an important consequence of his incarnation. His aim when he met people was to persuade them to believe his Father's dream for them. The divine agenda was in his mind and heart: he knew the project of his Father and wanted to share

[8] For a full description of the role of the mentor, see Brady and Grogan, *Meetings Matter!* 118–120.

it with us. Some accepted him; others did not. But those who did were transformed into daughters and sons of God: they became the visible community of God (John 1:11–12).

Jesus was always led by the Spirit, and so was a spokesperson for the Spirit when he met people. He was alert to the moments of grace in which those whom he encountered were open to seeing things in a new way—for instance, the woman at the well (John 4:6–29), or the blind man (John 11:1–38). He tried endlessly to communicate the divine agenda by word and action, and finally by his death, which he endured to gather into one inclusive community the scattered children of God (John 11:52).

Paul interprets Jesus' work as the breaking down of all barriers and divisions: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28; and see Colossians 3:11). 'If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.' (1 Corinthians 12:26) For Jesus, the divine agenda is an inclusive community. This is to be the Christian's task too.

A final question emerges: granted that meetings should be important to me because God is there with an agenda, how can I assist God and the group by my attendance? With the help of the *Deliberation*, I should now like to indicate some skills which can help to forward the divine agenda.

Insights from the Deliberation

Four central characteristics can be identified which distinguished the meeting known to history as the *Deliberation*. The mentor, if invited, can make contributions based on them, to a greater or lesser extent, at any meeting. They constitute key elements of good group dynamics.

1. The Maturity of the Group

> ***The Companions**: The size of their group was close to ideal; the companions were friends on the human level, at ease with one another: they were also 'friends in the Lord'. They listened well and looked out for one another. Despite differences of nationality, age and temperament they trusted one another; they shared a common history, had become a community over long years, and had endured much together on pilgrimage and in apostolic labours. Well-educated Catholics, they loved*

God and the Church: they were great-souled, sharing a common vision and a desire to serve others through obedience to the Pope.

The Mentor: He or she uses whatever strategies are conducive to healthy relationships within a group; hence the size and composition of the group, the nature of the participants and their formation for the task in hand are important. Simple touches which help to foster social ease make people feel more relaxed—a suitable location, décor, warmth, a welcoming smile, a cup of tea. It is helpful to agree on some ground-rules, such as punctuality, confidentiality, brevity, and enabling everyone to speak once before anyone intervenes twice.

When dissension occurs, the mentor can remind the group that chaos and emptiness should be anticipated before consensus is reached.[9] All those present have something to say—that is why they have come—and the mentor tries to ensure that each is heard, knowing that people often rightly feel that they will not be listened to. Listeners are asked to put a good interpretation on what is said (Exx 23). This helps people feel important and esteemed, and such appreciation can lead them to better appreciation of others.

A brief recollection of the history of the group—why and how it began, the role played by each member, its ups and downs—can foster a sense of bondedness. The Easter Vigil especially, but indeed every liturgy does just this for the Christian community, when we 'call to mind the great events that gave us new life in Christ'.[10]

Naming the gifts of each person present can melt down rugged and defensive individualism; interdependence or 'soft individualism' can emerge in its place, an openness to being affected by others. In this way the power within the group is shared among all its members. The constructive possibilities of differences can be highlighted, together with the common ground existing within the group. Acknowledgement of individuals' commitments of time, energy, interest and self-displacement can help to build up the health and maturity of the group. The members gradually become 'converted' to one another and value one another more highly.[11]

[9] See M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum* (London: Rider, 1987), 86–106.

[10] For an analysis of what he calls the 'graced history' of a group, see John English, *Spiritual Intimacy and Community* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992), chapters 4 and 5. Also Schemel and others, *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises for the Corporate Person,* volume 1, 41–44. For these authors, the dynamic of the paschal mystery underpins group functioning.

[11] Peck, *The Different Drum,* 128, argues that genuine community of sorts can be established in a few hours if certain guidelines are followed: of these the key one is that members speak for themselves, not for or against the others.

2. Commitment to Values

***The Companions**: They were committed to the highest value—God—and were indifferent or free in regard to everything else. They lived by the gospel, kept God before their eyes and prayed to be shown the divine agenda for themselves: they believed that the Spirit would help them in this quest. Their noble desire was 'to help others' wherever and however they could, and at whatever personal cost.*

The Mentor: He or she tries to promote the highest possible values within the group—to get the group to want what is best (for example justice, freedom) and to use ethical means to achieve it. If it is inappropriate to name religious or gospel values, the appeal is to conscience ('How would the poor feel about this?' 'What is best for all concerned?').

The mentor challenges falsehood or unethical proposals, and appeals to reason, conscience and human sensitivity.[12] Humanists accept these values and also subscribe to altruism, integrity and personal responsibility: they try to transcend divisive loyalties and work for the common good of humanity and the protection of the environment.

The mentor supports what promotes life, truth, love and justice, and uses imagination to challenge the *status quo* and to open up wider perspectives. As an agent of the good Spirit, he or she addresses the spirit of darkness and chaos which could lead to negativity in the group.

If no formal prayer goes on, the mentor prays on behalf of the group before, during and after the meeting, asking God to move people's hearts to what is best. To be the solitary delegate for prayer can seem a lonely role; it helps then to believe in the communion of saints—none of us is alone in prayer.[13]

3. Inner Freedom

***The Companions**: Each had made the Exercises to gain inner freedom, and they respected each other's freedom. They now tried to develop as instruments in the hand of God. They used various strategies to increase their objectivity and challenge their own personal motivations. Rather than defending or attacking an option, they listed its pros and cons. They prayed constantly to be at God's disposal; they worked in humble tasks*

[12] Bernard Lonergan names five values which are universally valid: 'Be attentive! Be intelligent! Be reasonable! Be responsible! Be in love!' See his *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder, 1972), 103–109.
[13] See Brady and Grogan, *Meetings Matter!* chapter 7, 'Keeping God in View: The Role of Prayer'.

during the day and lived in radical poverty to maintain generosity of spirit. Their inner freedom was based on trust in divine providence: they could identify the ways in which God had thus far cared for them. They were free in regard to everything other than being at God's service.

The Mentor: Keeping in view the Ignatian value of inner freedom or 'poised expectancy', as it has been called, he or she tries to unearth prejudices, whether corporate or individual, and to resist pressure within the group in order to win space for less vocal members to speak without fear of ridicule or reprisal. He or she interprets members positively to one another and encourages listening with the heart.

To loosen things up, the mentor uses techniques such as reframing ('Could we look at this in another way?') and brainstorming ('Let's throw in ideas about this issue without having to justify them'). Imagination can be invoked to balance the cerebral approach. The mentor proposes the 'uncertainty principle'—maintaining openness of mind until the time for decision arrives. Prior agreement on the criteria for decision-making saves the group from hasty conclusions. The mentor tries to empower the members of the group so that they deliberate out of confidence rather than fear and hostility.

4. Good Processes

***The Companions**: They debated whether to involve everyone in the decision, or to leave it to a selected group. They took care to shape their agenda, so that issues would not get confused. They gave these issues all the time needed—three months, as it turned out. To keep their feet on the ground they decided to minister daily to the poor and to meet in the evenings in an undisturbed setting: in this decision they took into account the needs of those to whom they had already been ministering. Not only did they pray and reflect, but they mobilised all their human capacities for their task: reasoning, imagination, listening. Instead of debating they all listed the arguments against obedience to a superior and then the arguments in favour of it. They asked radical questions about their future relationship to one another. They tried to think 'outside the box'. They listened well to each other. Their criterion for a good decision was clear—to promote the greater glory of God in the service of the Church. They waited in silent prayer for God's call to manifest itself in the form of joy or inner consolation. From past experience they could use guidelines to distinguish true from false consolation, and they helped one another to notice how God was beckoning. When they reached consensus, they mandated Ignatius to implement their decision, so that what was decided would in fact be carried out.*

> **The Mentor**: He or she helps to shape the meeting and to set priorities so that important issues get the time they need, asking for the facts so that there is no hidden agenda. The mentor tries to get all voices heard, and proposes techniques such as brainstorming and listing pros and cons as appropriate.
>
> The mentor helps focus the group on choosing whatever option is wisest and most helpful for those affected by it. He or she helps members to articulate appropriate criteria for their choice, and to notice the consonance or dissonance of their choice with their deepest values. The mentor has resources for conflict resolution, for the care of the group, and finally for self-care.

Further insights can surely be drawn from the *Deliberation,* but enough has been suggested here to give mentors a good idea of the resources available to them within the Ignatian tradition. At any given meeting perhaps only a few of these resources would be used. Mentors do not try to take over from the chair: like the original Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey* they play a quiet, limited but influential role. If their advice is not wanted, they do not take it amiss but await a more friendly moment. Some people play the mentor's role instinctively: you may be able to identify people who are good to have around at meetings, people who are escorts of grace at committees, boardrooms, councils and family gatherings. Ignatius himself might be regarded as the patron saint of mentors, given his quiet, positive style, his capacity to win people over, and his tenacity regarding the divine agenda and how it might be played out in decision-making.

Mentoring is demanding, but rewarding. The comments of students who have learnt the art of group mentoring may give courage to others to become mentors themselves.

> I have been confronted by the realisation that a divine agenda is behind every meeting, wanting to be addressed. I tended to see meetings as necessary evils, arenas for egoism, and I avoided them wherever possible. I have never been on a committee and have always refused invitations to serve. I rarely expected a place for God in a secular gathering. Now I see that there is no gathering where the Spirit is not present, invited or not. The realisation that I have the potential to make a difference is exhilarating. I now find it challenging to try to introduce gospel values without alienating group members.

> I used to hate meetings and avoided them when I could. I was always noticing the negatives: the chair's poor performance, people pushing their agendas, others waffling, and others giving off lots of toxic messages. I still hate the tension and I hate bad decisions …. But something has changed in me. While I still find meetings hard, I go because I believe God is struggling there and I should be there too. I just want the best possible outcome, where people are really helped by the decisions that are made. And I have some skills that can help. So now I'm noticing the positives![14]

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[14] See Brady and Grogan, *Meetings Matter!* 120, 136.