

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY, APOSTOLIC CREATIVITY AND LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Bernadette Miles

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY VERY NATURALLY offers a model of leadership that encourages apostolic creativity—both in individuals and in groups—particularly during times of change. Where change is prolific, insecurity can instil fear into an organization, and attention can become focused on ‘risk management’ rather than mission. We begin to doubt the abundance of God and apostolic zeal is curtailed by fear. We run the risk of leaving behind our apostolic charism for a corporate organizational model. I would like to explore here how an Ignatian approach to leadership can support an organization in maintaining its apostolic creativity under such conditions.

An Ignatian Model of Leadership

Before he died in 1556, over 1,000 men had joined St Ignatius on his apostolic mission ‘for the greater glory of God’ in the newly formed religious order, the Society of Jesus. There were many laymen and laywomen who also followed and supported Ignatius and his companions. Ignatius achieved this without the help of television, radio, the internet, newspapers or the telephone to communicate his message, in less than thirty years! *How did he do it?*

At the time, the world was in the midst of colossal change. The Church was in crisis and full of corruption; Martin Luther had been excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church, setting the Reformation in motion; Columbus had discovered the New World; Magellan had circumnavigated the globe, making the first recorded crossing of the Pacific Ocean. The world was in the process of being opened up, and the Church of being broken up. *Does this sound familiar?*

The Way, 50/4 (October 2011), 35–41

read more at www.theway.org.uk



In the early twenty-first century we understand what it is like to be in the midst of colossal change. When I talk to my children about the speed of change today, they say: 'but it has always been like this'. Change seems to have become the norm. In 1980 the Australian television programme *Beyond 2000* explored amazing possibilities for the future. At the time we could hardly imagine living in the year 2000, let alone think about the inventions and dramatic changes that the programme suggested would be part of our society and culture. Yet they are all here—the internet, hand-held computers, mobile phones, voice recognition, scanners and much more—and so are we. New technology appears on the market every day; walls and borders have been broken down; and globalisation is a reality.

The Roman Catholic Church faces increasing pressure to adapt its existing hierarchical and patriarchal structures to meet the needs of this continuously changing world. Resistance to change is strong and is held in tension with a genuine desire to live as one body, with one Spirit, with one mission.¹ Just as Ignatius laid deep and holy foundations for our apostolic work and was an extraordinary agent for change, we too have a responsibility to attend to change and be apostles for the future. We are guardians of a future not our own, and the work we do today will provide the building blocks for our children to come.

But what does it mean to be apostolic?

- To be an apostle is to be 'one who is sent out ... to carry on the work of Jesus';²
- to believe in abundance, not scarcity;³
- to take risks and trust that God will provide all we need;⁴

¹ See Bernadette Miles, 'One Body, One Spirit, One Mission: Uncovering Essential Elements of a Collaborative Ministry Team', in *The Proceedings of the Inaugural National Symposium of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction* (2010), available at http://xavier.ignatian.net/html/is2010/speeches/BernadetteMiles/One_body_one_spirit_163549.doc.

² Paul Achtemier, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 44.

³ 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly' (John 10: 10).

⁴ The miracle of the feeding of 5,000 (Matthew 14: 12–21).

- that the power of Holy Spirit is fully alive and present in our ministry and to expect grace to give energy to our work;⁵
- and to know that God will use us for the building of the Kingdom.⁶

Although there is no guarantee that God will act in a certain way, ‘one plants one’s feet firmly in midair and marches on in faith, hope and trust’.⁷ It is risky, but it is generative.

Although Ignatius would not have used the word ‘generativity’, he certainly understood that passion was essential in the service of God and neighbour. He went to great pains to draw the best out of the early Jesuits by helping them to discover for themselves *what they most deeply desired*.⁸ He assumed that the most effective and energetic Jesuits would be those who could generate their own zeal. Ignatius wanted Jesuits imbued with deep and holy desires. He wanted men who were mobile, educated and ready to go out into the world and be unique agents for the greater glory of God; and he trusted that the Holy Spirit would guide his group creatively through diversity.

Joan Chittester claims that:

Creativity, it is too often forgotten, comes out of differences. It is the ability to function outside the lines, beyond the dots, despite the boxes and the mental chains by which we have forever been constrained, that fits us to be the architects of the future. Instead, we want everyone to think alike when what we really need are people who are thinking newly—about theology, about God, about faith, about morality, about science, about life. ‘You won’t find this year’s birds in last year’s nests’, the proverb teaches, but we so easily miss the meaning of it entirely. Life is meant for moving on, the observation implies.⁹

The model of leadership given to us by St Ignatius would affirm this statement. Ignatius was courageous in that he functioned outside the lines. He encouraged individuals to experience God and to know Jesus

⁵ The coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 1–21).

⁶ ‘I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last’ (John 15: 16).

⁷ William Barry, ‘Discernment of Spirits as an Act of Faith’, in *Spirit, Style, Story: Essays Honoring John W. Padberg*, edited by Thomas M. Lucas (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2002), 38.

⁸ See E. Edward Kinerk, ‘Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus’, in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 16/5 (November 1984), 9–11.

⁹ Joan Chittester and Rowan Williams, *Uncommon Gratitude* (Minnesota: Liturgical, 2010), 41–42.

as a personal friend and then bring this relationship into the whole of their lives. He told us that love is expressed in deeds rather than words and that generosity is at the heart of mission. He taught us to be 'contemplatives in action' and created a new nest in the form of a missionary Church.

The Pitfalls of Economic Rationalism and Risk Management

Working as the director of the Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in Australia, I have felt a bit like 'this year's bird in last year's nest', and I have experienced considerable tension trying to fit into the existing patriarchal and hierarchical structures, which are not designed to support married women. At first glance it appears that I am in a world of scarcity: vocations to religious life and priesthood, once abundant, have diminished dramatically;¹⁰ costs are increasing; money and resources are decreasing. Yet it is from within this difficult environment that I have been empowered by the Jesuits to use my gifts in the service of God and neighbour in ways I could not have imagined.

St Paul reminds us that if we live by the Spirit, we will see a great diversity of gifts within the one body of Christ.¹¹ The Campion Centre gives witness to this truth as a thriving collaborative ministry, blessed by a team who bring to it an extraordinary diversity of giftedness. Lay people, men and women religious, ordained clergy and Jesuits work side by side in a creative ministry. It is my task as the leader to hold this dynamic group together and create enough space for them to discover the way in which God calls each one of them to use his or her unique giftedness for the greater glory of God and for the greater good of our ministry.

This can be challenging at times, and I often find myself getting caught up in the prevailing culture of economic rationalism and in the fallout from the global financial crisis. Sometimes it seems impossible to have a conversation about mission because the question 'how will we fund this?' tends to block apostolic dreaming about serving the People of God better. We sometimes rush to questions about means (the scarcity of money, personnel and other resources) before we are

¹⁰ See James and Evelyn Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership: A Model for Collaborative Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 16.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12: 1–27.



The Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality

clear about the deeper and more important questions: what is God calling us to do? What is our mission? Scarcity can cause anxiety and fear, and diminish the willingness to take risks. It would be easy to project this fear upward and blame the hierarchy for blocking our vision, but what I have discovered is that real power for ministry comes from within the group.

The Dynamic of Power in a Group

One view of power, which is a hangover from the medieval Church, would see the leader as having all the power. 'Power conferred in ordination belongs solely to the leader not to the community', which then in turn suggests that followers are powerless to participate in the full anointing given them as a royal and priestly people.¹² When we live out of the medieval view of church authority, we give away our power and live meagrely from a model of scarcity. This was my experience; I kept trying to give my power away, not understanding that 'the gospel

¹² Whitehead and Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership*, 17.

message for power is *dynamis—a dynamic*. I felt personally responsible for the success or failure of our ministry, not giving the team any room to feel empowered by their work. 'Power is not a commodity possessed by a few leaders but the dynamic interaction, for better or worse, that moves through a group of people.'¹³ The group hold the real power, energy and dynamic zeal for mission, and the leader's role is to encourage and enlarge this energy, generating power rather than feeling responsible for providing and delivering all the power alone. What a relief!

So I began to pay attention to the *dynamis* within the group I work with, and I discovered an extraordinary abundance of generosity, giftedness and passion for the ministry. The more I trusted the abundance, generosity, giftedness and creativity of the team, the more energy for mission was generated. Ironically this in turn increased our resources abundantly. The truth is that real power 'is the free commitment of individuals to goals and objectives which they have freely chosen'.¹⁴ Every team member had a deep desire to be with this group working in this ministry. It is a critical part of the leader's role to witness this desire, enable the work and encourage the giftedness of each team member.

Just as with the disciples at Pentecost, the gifts of the Spirit are not dispensed solely to the leader, but are poured out on to the entire group. The leader must recognise this and encourage the group to recognise it as well. Genuine authority in leadership fosters life and seeks fruitfulness; this is quite the opposite of taking control as an individual and feeling responsible for every outcome. The Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci based his ministry on friendship. He understood that relationship was crucial to apostolic mission and that if he was going to communicate anything, he needed to incarnate a willingness to change. Perhaps this is the most vital attribute of all for generative, creative, apostolic leadership.

Following Ricci's example, and that of Ignatius, I believe that the challenge of Ignatian leadership is to know that creativity comes from within the group; it is not imported from the outside. I believe that God somehow brings the right people together in friendship, and from

¹³ Whitehead and Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership*, 17.

¹⁴ James Borbely and others, *Focusing Group Energies: Common Ground for Leadership, Organisation, Spirituality*, volume 1 (Scranton: U. of Scranton P, 1992), 37.

such relationships flow the gifts of the Spirit. Creative leadership is built on the trust that all that is needed is given by God for the sake of building the Kingdom. But this is not blind trust. In the Rules for Discernment Ignatius encourages us to know the Spirit by the fruit, and tells us that we should follow the Spirit who brings peace, hope, love and increase in faith and joy (this sounds like abundance). Likewise we should distrust a spirit who brings anxiety, fear, disturbance, a lack of faith and hope (which sounds like scarcity).

An apostolic leader trusts the community of God's people within which God has placed him or her, and understands that his or her role is to encourage and develop the giftedness of the all members of the team, expecting God to bring an abundance of gifts to serve the mission. This Ignatian model of leadership encourages apostolic creativity and remains vital in our Church, offering the opportunity of a new vision for organizational development in our changing world.

Bernadette Miles is the director of the Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality (a Jesuit retreat house in Melbourne, Australia) and is married with four boys. She trained in spiritual direction and theology after twenty years of computer consulting and business management, and has a special interest in formation of apostolic leadership and applying the concepts of Ignatian spirituality to organizational development.