

**Alpha Sigma Nu Meeting of Faculty Advisers**

**March 5, 2011**

**Ignatian Honor**

I want to thank you for asking me to participate in these sets of reflections on AΣN and the appropriation of its new mission statement. We call this association an honor society. In these opening remarks I want to discuss the place of honor in the Ignatian tradition, especially in the basic spirituality that founds all Jesuit works and every Ignatian enterprise. We Jesuits can presume the link between spirituality and the work of the Jesuits as self-evident. However, in the 1999 proceedings from the first BC Conference on the Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts 1540-1773, Michael Buckley and Luce Girard called attention to the systematic avoidance among the contributing scholars of the symposium of the influence of spirituality on the scientific, scholarly, and artistic contributions of the early Society of Jesus. Only in their remarks at the end of the symposium did these two scholars explicitly emphasize how important it is to draw the link between a guiding spirituality and the productivity and quality of the work the early and pre-Suppression Jesuits. I am going to draw on that spirituality in my reflections on the meaning of honor.

There is ambivalence in Ignatian spirituality about the role of honor. A leitmotif is that honors are first to be the object of a certain ascetical distance when weighed before the salvation one's soul [Week I of the Spiritual Exercises]... Second, honors are to be positively eschewed compared to the fervent and total response to the call and the example of Jesus Christ [Week II of the Spiritual Exercises]... Third, the virtue of magnanimity, which is closely allied to honor, is proposed as a condition both for prayer and for action in that same spirituality [Weeks I and II and, especially, the reflections on the election to be made in Week II]. This ambiguity between avoiding honors and cultivating an honorable disposition to engage great enterprise has been the

occasion for a number of scholarly articles and ascetical analyses. The most accessible of these studies has been offered by Brian Daley, S.J. ["To Be More like Christ, The Background and Implications of 'Three Kinds of Humility,' " in *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 27/1 January 1995 and "The Pursuit of Excellence and the 'Ordinary Manner': Humility and the Jesuit University" in *For That I Came: Virtues and Ideals of Jesuit Education*, edited by William J. O'Brien (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997, 9-35].

In your effort to engage the implications of your revised mission statement I want to suggest some approaches which might prove helpful in our discussions about what this mission statement might mean in the lives of those who are recent members of AΣN or alums of the organization. At the outset let me add that while I am leaning heavily on the Ignatian tradition, I also want to be sensitive to the ecumenical reality that many associated with AΣN are not Roman Catholic. Nonetheless with sensitive adaptation these reflections can extend to their membership as well. Let me set out a set of propositions.

#1: From the outset of the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius presents a fundamental disposition for a woman or man who wishes to make these Exercises, "It is highly profitable for the exercitant to begin the Exercises in a magnanimous spirit and with great liberality towards their Creator and Lord..." (Annotation 5 from the Sp Exx). Magnanimity is the virtue that strives for greatness and that excellence which will most benefit others, even though it is difficult. As Aquinas says, "Magnanimity makes a person deem him or herself worthy of great things in consideration of the gift he or she holds from God" (Aquinas, ST 11-II, Q.129, Art.3). That attitude permeates the choices one makes under the influence of the Exercises, e.g., to choose what most leads to the service of the Kingdom preached, taught, and lived by Christ.

In the documents prescribing Jesuit formation appeals to the virtue of magnanimity runs like a thread that holds the fabric of service together, expressed most dramatically among the qualities to be possessed by the General Superior:

"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 (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. He should be superior to all eventualities, without letting himself be exalted by those which succeed or depressed by those which go poorly, being altogether ready to receive death, if necessary, for the good of the Society in the service of Jesus Christ, God and our Lord (Const. IX, c. 2, [728]).

Thus in the spirituality offered in the Exercises and in the adaptation of that same spirituality in the Constitutions of the Society, we find this same insistence on the virtue of magnanimity. One who settles for mediocrity is said to suffer from "pusillanimity" or "smallness of soul." Where the magnanimous person engages the great deed; the pusillanimous person shies away from great deeds or arduous tasks if these demands too much of him or her.

#2 At the same time Ignatian spirituality focuses on the importance of two realities in authentic Christian life: [a] the need to be humble and [b] the acceptance of humiliations as the way to humility. Humility for Ignatius is "a God-centeredness stemming from freedom from the self-centeredness of pride. It will also be marked by the liberality towards God that the language of the Exercises pinpoints in the word 'more' (mas)." There is a great deal

jammed in these reflections. Let me try to unpack some of the richness of the Ignatian spiritual instinct.

People are frightened of doing the right thing because of fear, especially the fear of failure, and especially the fear that they might not look good in the eyes of the world in which they love or work or study or play. "Looking good" becomes an end in itself. That was true in the time of Ignatius as it is true in ours. Thus in the Exercises when Ignatius talks about humiliations he means those events or attitudes or causes which embarrass us or even put us at risk in the social and cultural world around us. More important it was true in the culture that surrounded the historical Jesus. In his ministry and in his teaching Jesus challenged that fear of not looking good, especially by the kind of people he chose as his companions and friends and treasured audience (e.g., cf. Luke 15). Thus when Ignatius emphasizes the pivotal role that humility, humiliations, and poverty have in the authentic Christian life, he is emphasizing the priorities of the gospel. In the Ignatian apostolic scheme nothing hinders the performance of good works more than fear, ranging from simple misunderstanding to jealousy, from the possibility of public failure in the undertaking to the opposition of the powerful and influential. Without confronting the fears that inhibit the practice of true magnanimity, the work of the Kingdom is delayed, destroyed, or distorted.

**#3. The integration/reconciliation of humility and magnanimity in the Ignatian tradition.** Let me return to Aquinas to get a handle on the theological foundation for the Ignatian synthesis. Aquinas puts it this way: Magnanimity is "the stretching forth of the mind to great things" (ST II-II, Q. 129. Article 1). The life of the Spirit consists of "stretching forth" in our contemplation and in our action. To be, in the Ignatian tradition, a contemplative in act is to

be a woman or a man who stretches forth in life, who goes beyond the status quo by doing more, not busy work but significant and meaningful work.

In another commentary (on the Nichomachean Ethics) Aquinas points out that only the truly humble persona can be magnanimous because he or she is willing to risk failure to do the great deed.

This sense of apostolic risk lies at the center of the Ignatian understanding of the apostolic life: new enterprises, new approaches, new lands, new people, and new thought. These are some of the reasons that prompted Pope Benedict to confirm that Jesuits are to be at the frontiers where the Church and the world interface. He also reminded the delegates at GC 35 that this posture will bring inevitably misunderstanding and even conflict (c£ *Address of Benedict XVI to GC 35, 212112005* par. 2 to 4 incl.).

In summary, we can say that in Ignatian spirituality humility is an absolute pre-requisite for authentic magnanimity. This humble magnanimity is an attitude that put one's talents and training at the service of a cause greater than that of an isolated ambition, i.e., an ambition that looks only at what I can be and what I can attain. Humble magnanimity reorients that ambition to what I can do for my world.

#4. What does this reflection from the Ignatian spiritual tradition say to your Mission Draft? The heart AΣN is not only recognition of an excellence attained, it is also the call to an excellence that lies above and beyond. AΣN is a call to stretch the mind and heart to embrace a vision of excellence in service, in making one's talents reach out. That stretch that reaches out to embrace another person (e.g., Archbishop Romero or Dorothy Day) or a challenging project (e.g., Gandhi or Sister Helen Prejean) or an unfamiliar culture (e.g., Matteo Ricci or Mother Teresa). We call this stretch, this reaching out, service. You have invited those

who join AΣN to let their minds be stretched by faith not bounded or confined but inspired and curious to find what God reveals here and now in the tradition known and in the tradition still unfolding. Faith becomes a mission not only by a loyalty to what has been taught and passed on but a loyalty to what is emerging and summons us to new understanding of God's self-revelation in our contemporary world and in our own experiences. This is what it means to find God in all things. This is what we mean by "the service of faith."

You ask those who join AΣN to be able to develop men and women for others, especially in the ongoing struggle to make God's creation reflect the dignity and opportunity for human growth that God intended. The availability for all to be fully and authentically human represents the struggle for justice. The way people live and learn and love and cultivate their talents is important to all of us. To be indifferent to how people make their way in this one lifetime is to be indifferent to all Jesus taught and implied in the parable of the Good Samaritan. That parable is a kind of litmus test for every Jesuit enterprise. Have we heard and implemented Christ's final word to the lawyer who asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Have we gone and done likewise? This is what we mean by "the promotion of justice."

Our summons is to help those honored for their gifts and their hard work to stretch in the four ways of the Samaritan. Recall that the activity of the Samaritan is distinguished from the way of the priest and the lawyer, both of whom avoided the victim at the side of the road. AΣN calls its members to be honored to serve in the Samaritan tradition: (a) of contemplative reflection and action so that they are formed to be people who see the reality around them, (b) of compassionate response so that their hearts teach them how to care for what they see, (c) of the practical ability to respond with their gifts to the needs that they encounter, and (d) of the imagination to create a climate or network of sustained service as their legacy for others to follow.

AΣN has proposed a proactive organization dedicated to implementing its solidarity with the Jesuit character of their mission. The integration of faith and justice is a challenge to the leadership within each school to move beyond recognition to a renewed sense of service not as a condition for membership but as an exercise of its leadership because they belong to AΣN. In that sense, then, I see it as a call towards something different. Nothing unites the Ignatian-Jesuit ideal of humble magnanimity better than a commitment of minds and hearts to service, and today nothing describes that service better than the faith that prompts justice.

