

## WHITHER JESUIT LEADERSHIP?

Is there perhaps something anomalous in talking of Jesuit leadership? Is there a certain dissonance in relating the Jesuit way of proceeding and leadership? There would seem to be. The Roget's Thesaurus lists the following cognates for leadership: superiority, precedence, influence, directorship, authority, and prestige. In general we regard as leaders those who take the initiative especially when others are hesitant, show a certain daring and boldness, are able to influence others, even to impose their will on them, have strength of personality, independent judgment and the like. Yet, our Constitutions (813 - 814) remind us that the Jesuit way of proceeding is not so much to take the initiative as to be in the deepest union with God that we may be pliable instruments in his hand, for it is he who supports and brings to fulfilment our apostolic endeavours. In the Spiritual Exercises (189) we are reminded that such union and closeness with the Lord is in proportion to the surrender of our self-love, self-will and self-interest, features one normally associates with strong personalities, with leaders. So there seems a certain dissonance between leadership and the Jesuit way of life.

### The Two Struts of Jesuit Leadership

There is, of course, no real clash or conflict here. There is, however, a reminder that leadership in the Society is not, and cannot be, on all fours with leadership as the world normally understands. *Leadership in the Society hinges on a deep spirituality, the spirituality of discernment: listening, being led by the Spirit, and the inner freedom that such discernment demands.* Jesuit leadership has less to do with planning and acting than with seeking,

finding and doing God's will. However, Ignatius who, perhaps more than any other religious founder, emphasized that "it is never a question of choosing either God or the world; rather, it is always God in the world," (GC 34 85), quickly related this spirituality of leadership to listening, finding and doing God's will through the exercise of the human gifts the leader needs to be effective.

Thus, having established this spiritual perspective as the foundation of Jesuit leadership, Ignatius quickly adds the second and practical support: "When based upon this foundation, the natural means which equip the human instrument... to deal with his fellowmen will all be helps... therefore the human or acquired means ought to be sought with diligence..." (Const. 814). These then are the two struts on which Jesuit leadership must found itself: spiritual discernment, which encapsulates commitment to and closeness to the Lord and the internal freedom which is a condition for such discernment, and leadership skills which enable one to motivate, summon up energy in the group, promote a certain union of hearts and minds and thus create the conditions for decisive action. The thesis of this article is that both struts are essential if Jesuit leadership is to be possible. The sad truth is that such Jesuit leadership is currently conspicuous by its absence and this is so because one or other strut is lacking in the Jesuit leader.

#### Incompatibility of "*Cum Personalis*" and Apostolic Leadership?

Perhaps I can make my point by reference to those who feel that the poor leadership we find in the Society today has another basis. There are those who argue that there is an inbuilt flaw in our structure of governance which makes Jesuit leadership a near impossible task. This point was made to me most recently, and quite vehemently, by a Jesuit colleague in India who is also a professor of psychology. Taking the Provincial as a paradigm case of Jesuit leadership, he argues that to combine *cum personalis* with the role of Chief Executive is to place an intolerable burden on our Major Superiors. He cites as evidence the rather large number of Major Superiors in South Asia who have experienced burnout or severe health problems at the end of their term.

The structure of management in the Society, he argues, gives primacy of place to the account of conscience through which the Jesuit reveals himself to the Provincial in an atmosphere of genuine transparency. The wisdom of this is clear enough in theory: the Superior, with this intimate knowledge of the Jesuit in his strength and weakness, his aspirations and his anxieties, is in a privileged position to assign and direct him in his mission. In real life, the situation is very different. The fact that the Provincial has received the account of conscience places him in a very difficult situation and makes it hard for him to take executive decisions about transfers against the will of the Jesuit, deny

a permission requested or take disciplinary action. Should the Jesuit consider these decisions as unfair, unjust, or simply wrong, his negative attitude will breed resentment, may result in breaking off relations with the Superior, or even spreading gossip and rumours against the Provincial among the brethren and not infrequently even among outside "supporters." The aggrieved Jesuit thus presents himself as the victim of the "high-handedness" of the Superior even though he "manifested his conscience" to the Superior and thus made himself vulnerable. The general reaction of many seems to be to empathize with the victim. Thus, perhaps inadvertently, a sympathy lobby evolves on behalf of the victim, which effectively isolates and alienates the Superior. The Superior now becomes a kind of "outsider" to his own community.

This model, the argument goes, tends to cause a serious breakdown in Jesuit governance and inspirational leadership. On the one hand, the Provincial is expected to be truly supportive, caring and even protective of the Jesuit. On the other hand, he is disproportionately vulnerable to vicious attacks of character or judgment by subjects in general and disgruntled subjects in particular. Given that he has received the account of conscience, the Provincial is unable to defend or even to explain his decision without seeming to violate confidentiality. The aggrieved Jesuit feels no qualms in selective disclosure of what the Provincial said in their privileged communication and so judgments on the Provincial follow freely from many a quarter.

Hence, while the Provincial has the authority to take executive decisions, the lack of protection may lead him to decide what is most expedient, not what he believes is right, to garner the goodwill of those who could be vengeful if thwarted. There is danger that executive decisions of the Superior would then be driven by compromise and fear rather than Ignatian boldness and what is apostolically most appropriate.

The suggestion he makes, and others have made too, is to separate tasks so that the Provincial receives the account of conscience and is responsible for the *cura personalis* while an Assistant Provincial (by whatever name called) would be the apostolic leader. Of course, the Provincial in the tradition of the Society, would have the last word. It is difficult to see what such an arrangement would achieve. After all, *receiving the account of conscience would be a meaningless exercise if it were not related to apostolic decisions.* Further, if the Provincial has the last word, then a Jesuit unhappy with the decision of the Assistant Provincial would appeal to the Provincial. If his appeal is upheld, the Assistant Provincial will feel betrayed. If not, the Jesuit will feel disregarded. We have comparable situations when Jesuits appeal to the Provincial against the decisions of local superiors or directors of work, or scholastics against the decisions of Coordinators of Formation. The position of Vice Provincial for Formation, who was a Major Superior, introduced in South Asia was soon discontinued as it served no useful purpose, even though the Vice Provincial received the account of conscience, for there was always appeal to the Provincial beyond him.

#### Towards a Solution

I believe that a whole-hearted return to the two struts of Jesuit leadership is where we must seek for solutions. If a Provincial is perceived to be truly spiritual - by which I understand not one who spends hours in prayer or practices great austerity but rather one who is, or strives sincerely to be, free of self-love, self-will and self-interest - then his vulnerability to vicious attacks from disgruntled and vengeful Jesuits will be vastly reduced. Superiors lay themselves immeasurably more open to such criticism and negative judgments when they are perceived as lacking transparency, having pets or pet projects, being vindictive towards critics or others who think differently from them in open fora.

But more needs to be said, for is there not also the second strut? How one handles an account of conscience, how one deals with one who has to be transferred, reprimanded etc. are abilities a Superior may naturally possess, but that is not something to be assumed. Hence the need of training, the need to gain the skills for the proper management of the human and material resources the Provincial has in service of the mission. Jesuits are men on a mission and Jesuit leadership is internally related to ensuring the proper animation of such men and the fulfilment of the mission. Hence, neither conceptually nor practically can we think of Jesuit Major Superiors who are not both responsible for *cura personalis* and for the apostolic mission. Moreover, for the most part Jesuit Leadership relates less to decisions about individuals than to apostolic plans and initiatives: how they are to be evolved, sustained, and implemented and how accountability for them is to be demanded. In these areas proper skills in management, which include skills to motivate, enthuse, communicate, resolve conflicts, form teams, become assets Superiors need and which they often lack.

#### A Model of Apostolic Leadership

Let us now look at this wider responsibility of leadership the Provincial is required to exercise: the apostolic leadership of the Province. I believe that quite a drastic change in leadership style must replace the unipolar leadership that characterizes our current way of functioning. In a world that increasingly takes democracy and democratic norms as axiomatic, appointed leaders do not gain automatic acceptance. This is especially so for the young, who consider that respect for leadership must be earned, not demanded on the basis of religious principles. Thus obedience is, in a sense, the weakest weapon in a Provincial's armoury - though perhaps strongest in certain circumstances. In those special contexts it must be used with the utmost caution. In a world of increasing complexity, leadership requires a serious analysis and a grasp of realities: socio-economic, cultural, political, religious. Some of those nominated Provincials have such abilities by nature or training; most do not. For those who rejoice in such strengths no less than those who lack them, the way forward is through consultative and delegated modes of leadership.

The Society already places at the disposal of the Provincial structures for governance he can and should use, in addition to the traditional Consult.

There are Province Commissions for each major ministry and an overarching Commission for the choice of Ministries. It is a wise Provincial who lets these Commissions do the running and then, with great attention and openness, considers their recommendations and, normally, acts on them. In the same way, the Chair of the Ministries Commission can function as an overall apostolic leader, if the Provincial lacks the skills to lead the Province in articulating a vision and mission statement. Jesuits do not look for Provincials who are experts in every department. In fact, the know-all Provincial is a menace. What they want, and this takes us back to the first of our two foundational struts, is a man sincerely free internally, capable of genuine openness and dialogue; someone with sound judgment regarding persons and situations - a soundness that is usually the Lord's gift to a superior who is humble enough to truly listen and learn from those to whom he has delegated authority, and to others as well.

#### The Challenge of Implementation and Accountability

There is one area where the Provincial's leadership is really put to the test and where, more often than not, he is found wanting. This is the implementation of recommendations, sometimes decisions, taken through consultative processes like Province Congregations, Assemblies, Sector meetings and the like. It is here that we may profitably locate an Assistant for Province Planning (who may well be the Chair of the Ministries Commission), not as a bifurcation of the role of the Provincial as both Apostolic Leader and as responsible for *cura personalis*, but as an honest admission that the Provincial lacks the skills or the time to guide such macro planning and/or oversee its implementation. Such persons given delegated authority must themselves be appointed through a process marked by transparency, so that men both capable and who enjoy the trust of the Province are selected. One major difficulty Provincials face in this mode of governance is that the men they, and the Province, would love to have in such roles are themselves already over-extended in their ministry and can scarcely find the time to visit and animate their sectorial colleagues. However, such delegated authority at whatever level can succeed only to the extent that the Provincial is ready to demand accountability for non implementation.

Typically there are two kinds of reasons why the Provincial may hesitate to act against those who are recalcitrant or simply incapable of fulfilling

Province policies or expectations. One is the psychological blackmail to which he is vulnerable and which we have talked of earlier. The antidote has also been suggested: the personal credibility which surrounds, like a bullet-proof vest, the Provincial who is seen to be, or striving to be, free of self-will, self-love and self-interest. A second cloak of security is provided by the process the Provincial follows. If serious sanction is the recommendation of the Commission, and supported by the Consult, and the Provincial is known to take very seriously the recommendations of the Commission, then he need have no fear of being maligned, which can make cowards of the best of us.

The other reason is the lack of personnel. This is an argument used by Provincials in South Asia with disturbing frequency: we have no Jesuit to replace him. Especially in educational institutions, where requirements for posts as Head or Principal require years of service which Jesuits do not easily possess, it is not easy to replace one already in office. This is where Provincial should show his mettle and give a clear signal that non-implementation will meet with serious sanctions: even transfer from office. What then about the replacement? Here is where the Provincial must take yet another courageous step and find a replacement from among the laity. This step is not at all favoured by most in South Asia, as long as a Jesuit alternative is possible - and so a Jesuit who shows little regard for Province policies can continue to rule the roost because he is deemed irreplaceable.

In this connection, *there is urgent need for us to promote what we may call the ethos of up-down accountability, not just the down-up accountability we take for granted.* Thus, not only is the individual accountable to the Provincial, the community member to the Superior and the team member to the Director of Works, but the Provincial must be ready to give an account, at least in contexts such as Province Congregations and Province Assemblies, of his steward and be ready to listen non-defensively to those who have issues to raise. So also must the Superior be accountable to the community for the implementation of decisions agreed on in community meetings and Directors of Work to members of the team. Alongside this there is the horizontal or peer group accountability where members of the team or community, having experienced co-responsibility in a truly participative decision-making process, accept to be accountable for the responsibilities entrusted to them.

There is perhaps one role of leadership where the Provincial is really helpless to take any sanctions. I speak here of the Local Superior who is unable or unwilling (because he is so heavily involved in his ministry, for instance) to properly govern his community, one who just does not accept that his primary mission is to his community. Since such a Local Superior would be only too happy to be replaced, loss of the post is no sanction. The Provincial will need to use other arguments, including appeal to loyalty to the Society, to motivate such Local Superiors to proper governance. The Provincial's skills as animator may be severely tested in these cases.

I may appear to be guilty of reductionism, of making Jesuit leadership excessively democratic. While I believe that our world today calls for a certain democratization of our way of proceeding, I do not want to be misunderstood as promoting an idea of decision-making where numbers determine the outcome. Such a view would make a mockery of spiritual discernment. Hence, within the broad democratic perspective that gives due importance to participative decision-making, we must remember that the Jesuit leader, at least at the level of the Major Superior, sometimes stands alone in decision taking. Being leader is more than being coordinator. If the leader leaves a vacuum, others will fill it - sometimes for their own interests. Discernment cannot go on till consensus is reached, which can often be the lowest common denominator and may be bereft of dynamism and risk-taking. *The Jesuit leader must beware lest, like the second class of men, he seeks to bring God to where the Province is rather than strike out boldly, launch out into the deep, to where the Lord calls.*

#### Dimensions of Jesuit Leadership

I have tried to emphasize the main foundation of Jesuit leadership as understood by our Constitutions: intimacy with the Lord which makes discerning and doing his will our primary concern. *Jesuit leadership thus partakes of three interrelated elements-, search for God's will in total availability, a passion for mission and a particular "way of proceeding.* "This "way of proceeding" characteristic of Jesuit leadership is to summon up



energy and enthusiasm in the community or team, strive for union of hearts and minds in the group, and to act decisively. Jesuit leadership would thus seem to be a religious act, calling self, community and collaborators to develop a profound spirituality rooted in the Spiritual Exercises and capable of enriching its corporate commitment. Hence, contemporary managerial practice apart, Jesuit leadership, by its spiritual roots, would involve consultation and participation, transparency and accountability in order to obtain the involvement and commitment of all. For Jesuit leadership is for the sake of the mission. Mission incarnates itself in apostolic works and ministries. Our works are seen as apt instruments to carry of our mission. Other considerations like the power, the prestige, the influence, the finances they bring should not obscure this primary reason for undertaking our works. Jesuit leadership exists to ensure the goals and values of our apostolic works are adequately defined and implemented, guarding against goal displacement, a temptation to which our more prestigious institutions are often liable. *Jesuit leadership promotes an integration of religious and apostolic life so that our spirituality is always apostolic and our apostolic activity that of contemplative in action.*

#### Fostering Grassroots Leadership

Yet Jesuit leadership must take an even further step. We must offer not only leadership to institutions which are means for mission, but leadership in mission. A leadership concretized in mission becomes prophetic. Prophetic leadership is seldom smooth. Moreover, Provincials who are prophetic leaders are few and far between. Nevertheless, there can often be prophetic leaders among the rank and file. The Provincial does not abdicate but rather exercises his leadership in guiding discernment which reveals whether the Jesuit is truly a prophet, or a self-styled prophet on an ego trip. The Provincial must learn how to curb rampant individualism without curbing initiative and the pioneering spirit. He as leader must decide if he must rein in the individualist or give the prophet his head, recognizing that there is productivity and creativity in dynamic tension and that his leadership must not paper over tension and force uniformity but nurture and bring to fruition unity in diversity.

This reference to prophetic leadership at the grass roots leads me to point out that I have taken the Provincial Superior as the paradigm for Jesuit

leadership merely to help keep the picture simple and manageable. Clearly, Jesuit leadership is not to be identified with governance, nor is it confined to superiors, however necessary a characteristic it may be of effective Jesuit governance; nor is Jesuit leadership necessarily tied to an office. *Someone has suggested that governance may be likened to the head, whereas leadership pertains to the soul-animation.* Assigned leadership emphasizes governance, the head. Yet, if this is not expressed as true animation, the soul, then governance is simply an exercise of arid authority. One may say that every Jesuit is called to exercise leadership. Certainly, those who have apostolic responsibilities have to exercise leadership - within Jesuit groups and among people for or with whom they work.

### Concluding Comments

From my fairly extensive experience in South Asia and my limited experience here at the Curia in Rome, I am led to believe that Jesuit leadership is a bit thin on the ground. One rarely gets a really satisfactory terna which allows for real choice in appointment. In the west this is probably related to decreasing numbers and increasing age. In South Asia there may be something to the claim that the extent of apostolic needs, most of which require capacity for routine rather than leadership, has resulted in a growing number of recruits being accepted who can offer useful service. However, so the critique runs, this also increases substantially the number of men whose lives are characterized by mediocrity and this in turn bodes ill for the "certain apostolic aggressivity", the ceaseless striving for the magis that is characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding.

Another question raised often at meetings by older Jesuits in South Asia is whether the laudable insistence on inculturation is not also a limiting factor; whether Jesuits are capable of leadership and creativity only within their own milieu but are intimidated when thrown into another cultural scene. How much credence to give such critiques is hard to say. However, even among members of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia, there is little unanimity on whether the intellectual apostolate, which was the hallmark of Jesuit ministry in times past, should still be so today. What does seem to me to be true, nevertheless, is that a misguided understanding of egalitarianism inhibits those with real leadership potential from being identified, given special

training and, in general, from being pushed to their limit. I fear that in South Asia, all too often, the good is the enemy of the better and the best, that beleaguered Major Superiors trying to keep our many institutions afloat, do not train in sufficient numbers, men who will take impact the secular and religious world at the macro level. I do not, by any means, wish to identify leadership with academics. However, I do believe that the demands of serious studies stretch the mind and promote the creativity, the mental agility that Jesuit leaders need whether they are scholars, great preachers or leaders of social movements.

AND HERE LET ME END: with an acknowledgement and a hope. During GC 34, the Commission on Leadership and Planning prepared material which was never presented as a Document. Other Commissions were invited to "freely borrow" what they found helpful. The Commission on Collaboration with the Laity certainly did - and so have I in this paper. The hope is that I am deeply conscious that what I have said above is my very limited view. I would feel amply compensated for the time spent in presenting it if others, with more and/or different experiences, enter the lists and say their piece. In this way, we could help one another arrive at a deeper understanding of Jesuit leadership as meant for mission, which alone provides the universe of meaning for its exercise, and learn, each in our own way, how to exercise a leadership which directs our companions "on the path of salvation and perfection" (Cons. 551).

LISBERT D'SOUZA, S.J. General Counsellor and Regional Assistant for South Asia. Curia of the Society of Jesus, Rome.